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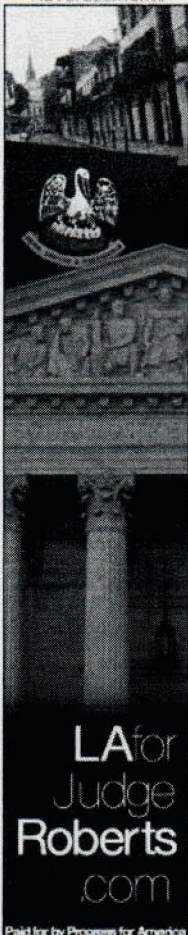
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## 2theadvocate News

### Gunter's Miss. hometown turns out for last farewell

By WILLIAM WEATHERS  
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Advocate sportswriter

WALNUT GROVE, Miss. -- For the first time in nearly five decades, former LSU women's basketball coach Sue Gunter came home for good.

Not since Gunter left in 1958 to pursue a college basketball career at Nashville Business College had she resided in her hometown of tiny Walnut Grove, Miss. (population 488), until Tuesday.



Advocate staff photo by Richard Alan Hannon

Gunter, who died Thursday morning at her home in Baton Rouge, returned to her native Leake County where she was buried next to her parents, grandparents and great grandfather at Mount Zion Cemetery, fewer than five miles from her childhood home on Gunter Road. She was 66.

LSU basketball coach Pokey Chatman hugs Felisha Foster on Tuesday as former LSU players Tameka Johnson, left, and Keia Howell, right, leave Sue Gunter's grave after an internment ceremony at Mount Zion Cemetery near Walnut Grove, Miss.

"They didn't make a better person," said Ed Logan, Gunter's high school basketball coach at Walnut Grove. "She was just a little country girl. She was just everything you would want a person to be. She's held in the highest esteem by the people that knew her. No one ever had a bad word to say about her."

A day after drawing about 1,000 people for a visitation and memorial service in her adopted hometown of Baton Rouge, Gunter's funeral service in Carthage drew nearly a third of Leake County's 3,000 residents.

However, this farewell was in direct contrast to Monday, when a veritable Who's Who of women's college coaches were in attendance, and former and current LSU players and a host of Lady Tigers fans said goodbye for the last time.

Gunter's return visit

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home was commemorated by family and long-lasting friendships, those with the ability to meld Gunter's successful career as a player with her Hall of Fame coaching career that lasted 40 years.

"She was a very purpose-driven person and at the same time had great humility," said Ovid Vickers, Gunter's speech teacher at East Central Community College in Decatur. "She had no ego at all."

The hour-long visitation at Wilcox Funeral Home played out more like the final scene from the movie "League of Their Own" when all the league's former players convened several decades later to celebrate their own wing in baseball's Hall of Fame.

They embraced, caught up on old times and began to reminisce about their playing days -- the games, the instances that still defined them to the present day.

The same held true for Jill Upton, Carla Lowery, Dot Grimes Arthur and Lois Cooper. They were all former high school or college teammates of Gunter, their friendships intact, their love for Gunter still evident.

"I used to play pick-up games with Sue all the time, depending on our milking schedule," said Lowery during her eulogy, noting that both women grew up on farms. "She never lost her love of family and her hometown."

It didn't take long, though, for the conversations to gravitate toward basketball and the exploits of Gunter, who was renowned for her all-around ability, leadership skills and fierce competitiveness.

"She had a deadly jump shot from the top of the circle," said Upton, who grew up three miles apart from Gunter and is nine months younger. "She would talk strategy on bus rides to the game. She would say if they doubled-teamed me she would take the shot and if they doubled teamed her, she would throw would throw the ball to me. I never played with anyone else who could get me the ball where I wanted it."

During Gunter's era basketball was a half-court game with six players on each side. They were never allowed to cross midcourt.

"There were many times that the ball would get just across midcourt and she was turning and shooting," Grimes Arthur said. "She was just deadly. I don't think I saw anybody as deadly a shooter as she was."

Logan, who spent 15 years in coaching and retired 23 years ago after serving as a principal, said Gunter had other endearing qualities in addition to averaging 25 points a game over her last three seasons.

"Sure, she was a tremendous shooter," he said. "But she was a competitor and she had the ability to keep a team together. She was so determined. You name it, she had it. Her ability was great, but it's the character of a person that makes a difference also."

With a void for women's basketball programs, Upton said it was Gunter, who after one season playing for Lucille Wood (who paid a brief visit) at East Central Community College, recommended they try out for the Nashville Business College's AAU team and attend Peabody College.

"She came home one weekend from East Central and said, 'you could major in this stuff,'" Upton said. "I said 'What stuff?' She said, 'Health and physical education. Well, that's for me.'"

Upton and Gunter headed to Canton for an all-night bus ride to Nashville where they quickly came to an agreement.

"We were in it for the long haul," Upton said. "We said if they made us secretaries at the business college we were leaving. We wanted to go to Peabody to play."

Gunter went on to a four-year career at Nashville Business College, earning All-American honors in 1960.

"She had the athletic ability for going where she went," Logan said, "and she had the leadership qualities to make a coach."

Gunter's final journey to her eventual resting place took her through the



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familiar rolling hills and farm land she grew up around. The funeral procession was greeted by a downpour halfway down a winding two-lane Miss. 487.

The rain turned to a steady drizzle as the procession turned into Mount Zion Cemetery before subsiding ever so slightly -- long enough for Gunter's gravesite service to conclude.

"By now she has challenged St. Peter to a game of horse," Lowery said during her eulogy. "And she's probably already won."

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